

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### Whooping cranes heading south

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

Ten of the world's most endangered birds recently flew across the Southern Appalachians, led by a trio of ultra-light aircraft.

The birds were the 10th group of whooping cranes to be escorted from Wisconsin in an ongoing effort to establish a new flock of migrating whooping cranes. For years all of the migrating wild cranes were part of a flock that flew between Wisconsin and Texas, however several years ago a project came together to establish an eastern flock of the cranes, flying between Wisconsin and Florida. The Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership brought together state, federal, and private wildlife biologists, along with pilots, veterinarians and a host of other professionals to help recover the whooping crane in the east. Thanks to their efforts, there are now about 106 whooping cranes in the wild in eastern North America.

In early December, this year's flock of birds crossed a corner of the Southern Appalachians, flying over Tennessee and Alabama on their way to wintering grounds in Florida. This year's trip has gone well, though one bird was recently diagnosed with a wing tendon injury, has been carried by truck for much of the migration and will likely become part of a captive breeding, research, or public education effort.

At the end of their journey, the birds will join wild birds wintering at Chassahowitzka and St. Mark's National Wildlife Refuges along Florida's Gulf coast and begin making the round-trip to Wisconsin annually.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.